

POMPEIAN ORNAMENT.

consists of a dado, about one-sixth of the height of the wall, upon which stand broad pilasters, half the width of the dado, dividing the wall into three or more panels. The pilasters are united by a frieze of varying width, about one-fourth of the height of the wall from the top. The upper space is frequently white, and it is always subjected to a much less severe treatment than the parts below, generally representing the open air, and upon the ground are painted those fantastic architectural buildings which excited the ire of Vitruvius. In the best examples there is a gradation of colour from the ceiling downwards, ending with black in the dado, but this is very far from being a fixed law. We select from the coloured illustrations in Zahn's work several varieties which will show how little this was the result of system:—

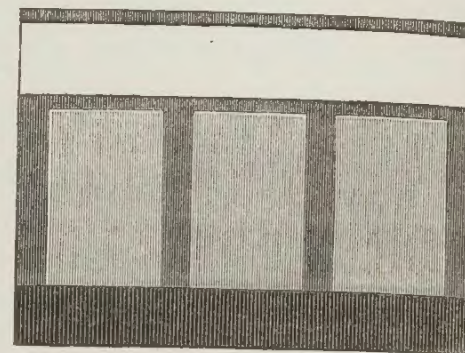


Diagram of the side of a Pompeian House.

Dado.	Pilasters.	Panels.	Frieze.
Yellow	Green	Red	Black
Red	Red	Black	Purple
Black	Yellow	Black	Red
Black	Yellow	Green	Green
Blue	Yellow	Green	Green
Blue	Yellow	Blue	Blue
Black	Green	Yellow and Red (alternately)	White
Black	Grey	Yellow and Red (alternately)	Black
Black	Black	Green and Red (alternately)	White

The most effective arrangement appears to be black dado, red pilasters and frieze, with yellow, blue, or white panels, the upper part above the frieze being in white, with coloured decorations upon it. The best arrangement of colours for the ornaments on the ground appears to be, on the black grounds, green and blue in masses, red sparingly, and yellow still more so. On the blue grounds, white in thin lines, and yellow in masses. On the red grounds, green, white, and blue in thin lines; the yellow on red is not effective unless heightened with shade.

Almost every variety of shade and tone of colour may be found at Pompeii. Blue, red, and yellow are used, not only in small quantities in the ornaments, but also in large masses as grounds for the panels and pilasters. The yellow of Pompeii, however, nearly approaches orange, and the red is strongly tinged with blue. This neutral character of the colours enables them to be so violently juxtaposed without discord,—a result still further assisted by the secondary and tertiary colours by which they are surrounded.

The whole style, however, of the decoration is so capricious that it is beyond the range of true art, and strict criticism cannot be applied to it. It generally pleases, but, if not absolutely vulgar, it oftentimes approaches vulgarity. It owes its greatest charm to the light, sketchy, free-hand manner of its execution, which it is quite impossible to render in any drawing; and

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which has never been accomplished in any restoration of the style. The reason is obvious: the artists of Pompeii invented as they drew; every touch of their brush had an intention which no copyist can seize.

Mr. Digby Wyatt's restoration of a Pompeian house in the Crystal Palace, Sydenham, admirable and faithful as it is in all other respects, necessarily failed in this; no one could possibly have brought greater knowledge, experience, and zeal to bear upon the realisation of that accuracy in the decorations which was so much desired than did Signor Abbate. The want of his perfect success consisted in the fact, that his paintings were at the same time too well executed and not sufficiently individual.

The ornaments which are given on Plate XXIII., and which have evidently a Greek character, are generally borders on the panels, and are executed with stencils. They have a thinness of character compared with Greek models, which show a marked inferiority; we no longer find perfect radiation of lines from the parent stem, nor perfect distribution of masses and proportional areas. Their charm lies in an agreeable contrast of colour, which is still further heightened when surrounded with other colours *in situ*.

The ornaments from pilasters and friezes on Plate XXIV., after the Roman type, are shaded to give rotundity, but not sufficiently so to detach them from the ground. In this the Pompeian artists showed a judgment in not exceeding that limit of the treatment of ornament in the round, altogether lost sight of in subsequent times. We have here the acanthus-leaf scroll forming the groundwork, on which are engrafted representations of leaves and flowers interlaced with animals, precisely similar to the remains found in the Roman baths, and which, in the time of Raphael, became the foundation of Italian ornament.

In Plate XXV. we have gathered together all the forms of mosaic pavement, which was such a feature in every home of the Romans, wherever their dominion extended. In the attempt at relief shown in several of the examples, we have evidence that their taste was no longer so refined as that of their Greek teachers. The borders formed by a repetition of hexagons at the top and the sides of the page, are the types from which we may directly trace all that immense variety of Byzantine, Arabian, and Moresque mosaics.